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RR RUEHPA
DE RUEHBP #0257/01 1170927
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 270927Z APR 09
FM AMEMBASSY BAMAKO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0270
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS 0627
RHMFIS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAMAKO 000257

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/27/2019

TAGS: PHUM PINR PREL PTER PGOV ML

SUBJECT: TUAREG CLAIMS HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AS ICRC
SEEKS PRISON ACCESS

REF: A. 07 BAMAKO 01006

- 1B. BAMAKO 00047
- 1C. BAMAKO 00037
- 1D. BAMAKO 00246

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(C) Summary: On April 9 Tuareg trafficker turned National Assembly Deputy Deity ag Sidamou described human rights abuses allegedly perpetrated by Malian army Col. Abderahmane ould Meydou and other ethnic Arabs against captured Tuareg rebels. It is impossible to discern whether ag Sidamou's account is truthful and reasonably accurate or manipulative and without basis in fact. On April 2 the ICRC told the Embassy it had no evidence that Tuareg prisoners had been mistreated but remained unable to visit imprisoned Tuareg rebels in Bamako. ICRC concern over the status of these prisoners is growing. The ICRC's Geneva based Director for West Africa and Niger-based Sahel Director raised this issue with the Presidency on April 20. End Summary.

Deity ag Sidamou

3.(C) Ag Sidamou is an Idnane Tuareg from Tessalit who was, and may still be, deeply involved in northern Mali's smuggling trade. The Tuareg rebel Alliance for Democracy and Change (ADC) selected ag Sidamou as the group's "Finance Secretary" in 2006 even though ag Sidamou appears to be finance secretary for no one but himself. Ag Sidamou was lightly wounded in the ADC's October 2006 attacks against what was then the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), now AQIM (Ref. A). Although ag Sidamou does not speak French, he won election to the National Assembly in 12007. In May 2008 he was linked to a rebel attack on a Malian military convoy near Tessalit - an allegation he denied. Most recently ag Sidamou helped orchestrate the February disarmament of Idnane rebel factions north of Kidal, likely with Libyan financing. He recently returned from Tripoli in time to attend the opening of the National Assembly's April session.

Allegations of Extra Judicial Killings

4.(C) On April 9 in Bamako ag Sidamou told the Embassy that Malian officials were blocking access to 22 Tuareg prisoners in Bamako in order to prevent observers from documenting inhumane detention conditions and descriptions of abuse and torture by members of the Malian military. Ag Sidamou said he believed that only 15 of those imprisoned in Bamako were actually Tuareg rebels, with the rest being Tuareg civilians caught up in military sweeps of northern Mali. The rebels were captured on January 12 near Kidal and during the January

22 battle of Bourghessa against forces belonging to rogue Tuareg rebel leader Ibrahim Bahanga (Refs. B and C).

5.(C) Ag Sidamou alleges that when fighting subsided in Bourghessa on January 22, Malian soldiers led by Col. Abderahmane ould Meydou and Col. Baba Ahmed lined up two seriously wounded but still alive Tuareg fighters and then rolled a vehicle over them. Ag Sidamou said ould Meydou was in the vehicle at the time. Afterward, ag Sidamou said ould Meydou got out of the car to say he'd committed this act in order to send a message to other Tuaregs. Col. ould Meydou and Col. Ahmed are both ethnic Arabs. Ag Sidamou said Malian troops used ropes to tie other captured Tuaregs to the backs of vehicles, then dragged them to their deaths.

6.(C) To substantiate these claims, ag Sidamou said he had recently obtained photographs of the victims taken at the scene by Malian soldiers. These photos, which ag Sidamou has not to date shared with us, have apparently been circulating amongst the Malian Arab community in Gao. Ag Sidamou added that the individuals depicted in the photos were so badly disfigured that it was impossible to determine their identities, and that he did not personally know the victims' names. He claimed news of this incident caused a serious falling out between Col. Meydou and Col. Elhedj Gamou, a Tuareg officer leading a militia composed of Imghad Tuaregs that also clashed with Bahanga.

ICRC Concerns Growing

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7.(C) The ICRC delegate in Bamako said Malian authorities have parried ICRC requests to visit captured Tuareg rebels and terrorist suspects in Bamako. Both groups of detainees - Tuareg rebels and suspected AQIM associations - appear to be in the custody of Malian State Security (DGSE), meaning that these individuals currently inhabit a judicial netherworld disconnected from formal civilian legal mechanisms or Malian military tribunals. The ICRC has spent several months ping-ponging between the Ministries of Defense, Security, Justice, and the Presidency. Further complicating matters is the ICRC's own standing in Mali, as it has no official mandate in Mali and has concluded no agreements with the Malian government regarding prison visits. The ICRC did successfully visit Tuareg rebels detained by Malian forces and Malian soldiers captured by Tuareg rebels in 2008.

8.(C) On April 2 the ICRC delegate said that the ICRC had no evidence indicating that any of the Tuareg rebel prisoners had been mistreated by Malian authorities. The ICRC did begin the process of visiting one or two of these detainees in March but quickly ended the visit after Malian authorities prevented the ICRC from following its standardized and regimented prison visit procedures. The ICRC subsequently lost track of where Tuareg rebel prisoners were being held and under whose jurisdiction.

9.(C) The ICRC said attempts to visit terrorist suspects have been even less successful as Malian officials have yet to admit to the ICRC that any of individuals of this category are even in custody. The ICRC also reported encountering more difficulties with Malian authorities following the February 26 road accident that killed four DGSE officers and one of the two Mauritanian terrorism suspects Mali was transporting from Gao to Bamako. COMMENT: The Malians may now be able to accurately say that there are no terrorism related prisoners in Bamako - apart from Tuaregs recently captured in connection with the European kidnappings. END COMMENT.

10.(C) During an April 17 meeting with the Embassy, Secretary General of the Presidency Django Sissoko did not commit to access for the ICRC, offering instead assurances of

no human rights violations in Mali. On April 20 the ICRC's Geneva based Director for West Africa and Niger based Director for the Sahel met with Sissoko to discuss prison visitation rights. Clearly disappointed ICRC officials subsequently told the Embassy that Sissoko's message was identical to the one he delivered to the Embassy a few days before.

Comment: Captured Rebel Limbo

11.(C) Deity ag Sidamou's past, and probably present, role as a Tessalit based trafficker would likely not make him an ideal witness for the prosecution. Yet we take the fact of his allegations of human rights abuses seriously. Mali could ease concerns about the status and treatment of captured Tuareg rebels by working with, as opposed to obstructing, the ICRC. Allowing the ICRC to visit these individuals may also relieve some of the tensions brewing amongst Tuaregs in Kidal over the murky status of their captured colleagues. On April 20 Mali released eight Tuareg civilians who were apparently caught up in security sweeps of Kidal in January and February, leaving approximately 14 Tuareg rebels still in custody (Ref. D). This partial liberation of Tuareg prisoners, and Mali's upcoming April 26 local elections may temporarily divert Tuareg attention away from imprisoned rebels in Bamako and reduce the likelihood of restive Tuaregs trying to capture some Malian soldiers of their own to even the score. Once the election results are in, however, we may be back to business as usual in Kidal.

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